

An Email to Housemates: On Boyfriends or Girlfriends Sleeping Over

Hi Friends,

Thanks for the great start to the conversation yesterday. So, just to recap and to have a running written record of what we're talking about, some of us in the house are concerned about what picture the children – ages 12, 7, and 5 – are getting of dating relationships. Significant others sleep over, and some of us seem to be sleeping over at their places. Given that we all say that we're Christians, this picture is confusing, even if we're avoiding premarital sex. This is a concern in and of itself.

There is the argument that we ought to avoid the very 'appearance' of sinning. The King James Version of 1 Thessalonians 5:22 reads, 'Abstain from all appearance of evil.' In American culture, if a boyfriend and girlfriend share the same room, or the same bed, people (usually rightly) assume that they are having sex. Perhaps the couple is doing almost everything *but* having sex, venturing fairly far down the path of sexual arousal. If we heed the pattern laid out by *The Song of Songs*, and live by the guideline of 'affection not arousal,' (compare *Songs* 2:7 and 3:5 with 4:16; see my message on *Song of Songs* 3:6 – 5:1) then the couple is already going way too far.

So when Christian boyfriends and girlfriends sleep in the same room or bed, it does raise serious questions. While we might place the problem on other people for making that assumption, it nevertheless invites concern for the couple. The 'appearances' argument is weakened, though, because the older KJV English carried a different meaning when it used those words. So most other translations will translate that verse, 'Abstain from every form of evil,' and dispense with the language of 'appearances.'

Children, however, are impressionable and Jesus cares about their spiritual development. He said, 'But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea' (Mt.18:6; Lk.17:2). Although Jesus is talking about people who are not just biologically young, but also spiritually young, children are both.

However, in my opinion, there's an even deeper issue, and I'd like us to discuss this. Even if there were no children in the house, I think this behavior still causes difficulties. Here's my reason why: There is more to marriage than just sex.

Marriage builds *a household*. Lauren Winner, in her book *Real Sex: The Naked Truth About Chastity*, writes about this (p.54 – 60). There are other ways of intertwining two lives in a marriage-like way, like staying in the same hotel room, opening a joint bank account, arousing each other sexually, and theoretically doing something as meaningful as adopting kids together. The reason I think all those things are inappropriate for dating couples is because I think we are to honor and reserve for marriage the whole picture of marriage and all its aspects. So it's not just that sleeping in the same physical space could be a temptation to move from the couch to the bed to have sex, which of course it is. Or, that it could mislead other people to think that the couple is having sex, which it does. I believe, additionally, that the behavior in itself is inappropriate. It simply doesn't belong in the category of friendship and is a mistake in and of itself.

Granted, there is nothing in the Bible that explicitly prohibits boyfriend and girlfriend sleeping in the same room, or the same bed. But that is because the Bible assumes that such behavior is completely inappropriate. It would be hard to argue that a culture where family bonds were so strong, and where a woman would primarily let her hair down only for her husband in the privacy of their bedroom, which is the culture Jesus grew up in, would permit a non-married couple to sleep in the same room. It would be flatly dishonorable. 'Sleeping over' would have been inconceivable for people in biblical times, not to mention traditional non-western cultures, because they valued marriage and married households so highly. Thus, the New Testament sees *households* as vitally important, as shown by the number of times the concept of the Christian household comes up (Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9, Colossians 3:18 – 4:1, 1 Peter 2:18 – 3:12, Titus 1:5 – 9, 1 Timothy 2:8 – 3:15). This probably comes out of Jesus' original strategy of establishing believing *households* (Matthew 10:12 – 13; Mark 6:10; Luke 9:4; 10:5 – 7). Likewise, caring for widows and orphans (e.g. James 1:27) can be rephrased as incorporating those without families into a kind of family, because God places the lonely into families (Psalm 68:5 – 6). 'Marriages, in other words, are not meant to be simply pairs of people in love; they are institutions out of which cultures and societies are formed.

Households are the foundations of communities.’ (Winner, p.57) It was simply understood that marital sex and physical proximity helped glue together all the other elements of a married household.

So my desire to not have boyfriends or girlfriends sleeping over in your room, or on the couches in the common spaces, is because it gets people into the habit of breaking ‘pieces’ of marriage off of marriage and shifting it into the realm of friendship or dating. I don’t think those ‘pieces’ belong over there. For example, if I (as a married man) were to stay overnight at a female friend’s place, even if nothing sexual happened, we would all probably think that something is weird about that. Maybe if it happened once on a night with a snowstorm where driving home would be dangerous, we might understand. But otherwise, especially if it happened more than once, it would register on us all as quite strange. And it would be, because where you regularly sleep is part of the larger issue of marriage and building a household.

One other item, just to be comprehensive while we’re on this topic. Back in the earlier days of the house, we also had an agreed upon guideline that an unmarried man and woman would not be behind a closed bedroom door. Do we want to agree on that explicitly? I’m in favor of it.

Thanks,
Mako